

attempt to resolve the issue between the parties involved, and providing as a last resort for a private hearing before council. The question of the legal liability of ACM in such a process, involving as it does the credibility and careers of the involved parties, is a difficult one. There was some sentiment to seek legal advice now (costing \$4K to \$5K), but the majority favored either seeking additional non-legal information (what do other societies do, etc.) or for taking no action until a case actually arose (my view). Consequently, the matter has been delayed until next meeting.

Sincerely,

Bill Gear

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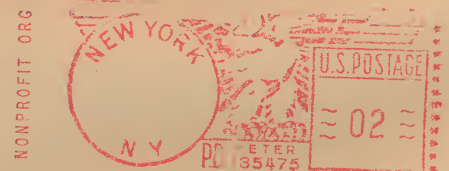
North Central Regional Representative

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REGIONAL STUDENT MEETING The first ACM North Central Regional Student Meeting is on March 26 at Urbana, IL. Plans are well underway and ACM Vice President, Dan McCracken, has agreed to give the keynote address at lunch on Saturday. If you haven't received information and would like to know more, write me or the Co-chairpersons for the meeting, Mary Jane Irwin and Will Gillett, at the same address as mine. (If you want to save writing, circle this message and send it in an envelope to me. Be sure your address label is still attached!

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October, 1976

To the ACM Members in the North Central Region

1476 registrants have left Houston now that ACM 76 is in the past, each a little poorer (no big city is a low cost area) but, I hope, a lot wiser. The meeting made about a \$7K profit for ACM. (NCC is the big money maker. NCC 76 will return more than \$75K to ACM.) In addition to the opportunity to catch up on professional activity and the activities of old friends, the local arrangements committee did a splendid job so everybody had the chance to go to a western BBQ and Rodeo. The feature of the program was a cow chip throwing contest in which several officers of the association demonstrated their well known abilities to throw it.

This activity continued on to Saturday for the Council meeting, and, as usual, the purpose of this regional newsletter is to keep you informed of the direction in which ACM is headed and to solicit your comments and suggestions. A number of activities were discussed and actions taken. The item of greatest general interest is undoubtedly the question of the future of publications, so I will report on those discussions first, and then summarize other actions.

In fact, no radical action was taken on publications. Discussions with many people, including those who attended the member-officer forum on Wednesday evening at ACM, indicate that there is no desire for really radical changes, just a realization that something must be done for the "practitioner", the person who is heavily involved in the day to day use of computers, but is not interested in research articles aimed only at other researcher workers. Stuart Lynn, the publications Board Chairman, presented a set of planning objectives for discussion, taking the approach that the first step in planning changes is to agree on the objectives, a task that is a lot simpler than getting agreement on an eventual plan which will have to fill in the details and balance the benefits to the wide constituency of ACM.

I am in complete agreement with the philosophy represented by the objectives (which are summarized below) because I believe strongly that the primary function of a professional society is as a two way information channel between the practicing and research oriented segments of its membership. The publication of research material need not be an impediment to such communication, in fact it should be one of the facets of the communication channel. There is no reason why most articles describing new research results cannot be written so that they are comprehensible to anybody with a minimum knowledge in the area, and in at least one publication (which I think should be CACM), the principal emphasis

should be on presentation style. If research is not published in a readable form, that research may as well not be done, and certainly society, which is funding it in some direct or indirect way, is wasting its research bucks if it does not demand readable publication of research results. The other end of the two way channel is publication by the practitioner of material that indicates what needs to be done. This can be in the form of short publications describing problems, (plenty of journals have problems sections; I see no reason why there should not be one in CACM) and, of even more value, critiques of research articles, indicating the way in which they fail to solve the problem. Publication of what has been done by the practitioner is also desirable, but there is the generally recognized problem that few employers have any motivation to encourage their employees to publish such material.

Before I either bore or anger you with my views, let me summarize the planning objectives for future publications. To me, the important phrases are:

Primary emphasis should be on satisfying present members; ..." - in other words, we should not change our publications simply to attract new members at the expense of old.

"The plan should provide for ACM to increase its publication of material directly useful to the practioners and to those concerned with developing and implementing applications."

"The plan should provide for ACM to attempt to enhance its image as the primary publisher of scholarly material in computing." - as I said above, these two sets of material need not be, indeed, should not be, disjoint.

"The plan must ensure that every ACM member receives at least one publication containing technical material as part of his or her basic dues, ..."

"The plan must provide for any member who so wishes to receive a general interest publication as part of his or her basic dues."

"... the plan should seriously investigate the possibility of further unbundling ...[to ensure] that a member need only subscribe to those publications of most interest ..."

"The plan must address the structure and future direction of special interest publications, and their relationship to the SIG structure and organization."

The last point seems to me to be particularly important. There are a number of people who feel that the most valuable material appears in some of the SIG newsletters - because the publication delay is short (about 3 months compared to nearly 2 years with CACM because of its 10 month backlog of papers) and possibly because they are not refereed (and therefore "don't have to have all those mathematical formulas in them"). Several of us were kicking around the thought

that a general interest journal could draw on the SIG newsletters and similar publications by requesting the authors of the good, broad papers to submit polished versions for general publication. Even the reprinting of some of the papers in the SIG newsletters would be of benefit because very few members can afford to subscribe to many of the SIGs.

In the last newsletter, I asked for comments on possible publication changes, and I appreciate the approximately twenty replies. A small majority favor introduction of a new publication. Very few prefer status quo. My own opinion is that CACM should be revised to make it of more general interest. If this means that there is then a need for a narrower journal for aspects of software, that is fine, but such a development should be independent of the effort to meet the needs of the general membership. CACM was not intended as a publication for a small segment of ACM, and it should not be allowed to drift that way. The need for a narrower journal should be analyzed carefully before one is started. As far as unbundling is concerned, I view it as almost entirely a financial decision with a preference to unbundling if financially viable.

Other action at the council meeting included a number of announcements of, requests for, and appointments of, committees - actions in themselves dull but they do indicate directions considered important. The committee on self-assessment, which published a snapshot of such a test in the May 76 CACM, has been turned into a standing committee, recognizing the good reception that their work received and ACM's intent to continue. An ad hoc committee on election procedures has been established, reflecting the unhappiness of some with the selection procedures. Past president Jean Sammet is chairing a committee considering the perennial questions "Should ACM have a fellow grade?" Comment anyone?

The financial status of the society continues to improve. A \$32.5K profit was made in the first two months of this year. This compares to the budgeted \$35K loss for the year, so we are doing very well on the bottom line.

Major actions (or inactions) by council were on Honoraria policy, conference fees, and code of ethics enforcement. The Honoraria policy, whose principal purpose is to prevent abuse of your funds, has created some unhappiness among units that frequently organize meetings for which it is necessary to pay speakers. Finally, agreement (with only two dissenting votes) has been found on a policy that allows a fee of up to \$150/day to be paid to people employed in some facet of a meeting or other activity. Any higher fee must be approved by an appropriate board. The conference fee question concerns a charge of \$300, levied by ACM against conference budgets to support the assistance provided by headquarters. It has been cancelled effective 7/1/77. (In fact, it was cancelled by executive committee action and council did nothing to change it.)

The code of ethics question caused considerable debate. The code, which is part of Bylaw 21, calls for sanctions such as suspension or expulsion against members who violate it. (The code was also published in April, 73 CACM.) A committee had been asked to consider ways in which the code could be enforced, and had produced a thoughtful document suggesting a mechanism by which a member could lodge a complaint and proposing a procedure by which there would be an